

**Listing of Claims:**

Claims 1-10 (Canceled).

11. (Currently Amended) An image pickup apparatus comprising:

an image pickup element for picking up an image of an object;

5 a shutter key for producing an operation signal when depressed; and

a main control unit for directly receiving the operation signal produced by operating the shutter key, for sensing ~~as an interrupt signal~~ an initial change to an on state in the operation signal and to thereby give providing an instruction to cause the image pickup element to start to pick up the image of the object when the on state is sensed once, and for determining that the shutter key is released when an off state of the operation signal ~~was~~ is sensed successively a predetermined  
10 number of times by sampling the operation signal at predetermined intervals of time.

12. (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 11, further comprising:

a sub control unit for sampling a second operation signal, produced by depressing a key switch, at predetermined intervals

5 of time to thereby produce a sampled signal, and for delivering information on the sampled signal to the main control unit.

13. (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 11, further comprising:

5 a sub control unit for directly receiving a second operation signal produced by depressing a key switch, for sensing an on state of the received second operation signal, and delivering information on the sensed on state of the second operation signal to the main control unit.

14. (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 11, further comprising:

5 an image processor, responsive to the instruction given by the main control unit, for producing a drive timing signal to cause the image pickup element to start to pick up the image of the object, and for processing data on the image of the object picked up by the image pickup element.

15. (Currently Amended) An image pickup apparatus comprising:

an image pickup element for picking up an image of an object;

5           a shutter key for producing an operation signal when depressed;

          a main control unit for directly receiving the operation signal produced by operating the shutter key, for ~~once~~ sensing an initial change to an on state of the operation signal by sampling  
10   the operation signal at predetermined intervals of time ~~and to thereby give~~ providing an instruction to cause the image pickup element to start to pick up the image of the object when the on state is sensed once, and for determining that the shutter key is released when an off state of the operation signal ~~was~~ is sensed  
15   successively a predetermined number of times by sampling the operation signal at predetermined intervals of time.

16. (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 15, further comprising:

          a sub control unit for sampling a second operation signal, produced by depressing a key switch, at predetermined intervals  
5   of time to thereby produce a sampled signal, and for delivering information on the sampled signal to the main control unit.

17. (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 15, further comprising:

          a sub control unit for directly receiving a second operation signal produced by depressing a key switch, for sensing an on

5 state of the received second operation signal, and delivering information on the sensed on state of the received second operation signal to the main control unit.

18. (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 15, further comprising:

an image processor, responsive to the instruction given by the main control unit, for producing a drive timing signal to  
5 cause the image pickup element to start to pick up the image of the object, and for processing data on the image of the object picked up by the image pickup element.

Claims 19-20 (Canceled).

21. (Currently Amended) An image pickup method comprising ~~the steps of:~~

directly receiving an operation signal produced by depression of a shutter key; [[,]]

5 sensing ~~as an interrupt signal~~ an initial change to an on state in the operation signal, and to thereby instruct then instructing an image pickup element to pick up an image of an object when the on state is sensed once; and

10 determining that the shutter key is released when an off state of the operation signal ~~was~~ is sensed successively a

predetermined number of times by sampling the operation signal at predetermined intervals of time.

22. (Currently Amended) An image pickup method comprising ~~the steps of:~~

directly receiving an operation signal produced by depression of a shutter key; [[,]]

5       sensing an initial change to an on state of the operation signal by sampling the operation signal at predetermined intervals of time, and then instructing an image pickup element to start to pick up an image of an object when the on state of the operation signal ~~was~~ is sensed once; and

10       determining that the shutter key is released when an off state of the operation signal ~~was~~ is sensed successively a predetermined number of times by sampling the operation signal at predetermined intervals of time.

23. (New) An image pickup apparatus comprising:

an image pickup element for picking up an image of an object;

a shutter key for producing a first operation signal when depressed;

a key switch for producing a second operation signal when depressed;

a main control unit directly connected to the shutter key for sensing an on state of the first operation signal, and for instructing the image pickup element to start to pick up the image of the object when the on state of the first operation signal is sensed; and

a sub control unit connected to the key switch for sensing an on state of the second operation signal, and for delivering information on the sensed on state of the second operation signal to the main control unit.

24. (New) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 23, wherein the main control unit senses an initial change to the on state in the first operation signal produced by operating the shutter key, and instructs the image pickup element to start to  
5 pickup the image of the object when the on state of the first operation signal is sensed once.

25. (New) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 24, wherein the main control unit senses the initial change to the on state in the first operation signal by sampling the first operation signal at predetermined intervals of time.

26. (New) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 23, wherein the main control unit determines that the shutter key is

released when an off state of the first operation signal is sensed successively a predetermined number of times by sampling the first operation signal at predetermined intervals of time.

27. (New) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 23, wherein the sub control unit samples the second operation signal produced by depressing the key switch at predetermined intervals of time to thereby produce a sampled signal, and delivers information on the sampled signal to the main control unit.

28. (New) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 23, further comprising:

an image processor, responsive to the instruction given by the main control unit, for producing a drive timing signal to cause the image pickup element to start to pick up the image of the object, and for processing data on the image of the object picked up by the image pickup element.

29. (New) An image pickup method comprising:

a main control operation of directly receiving a first operation signal from a shutter key, sensing an on state of the first operation signal when the shutter key is depressed, and  
5 instructing an image pickup element to start an image pick up

operation when the on state of the first operation signal is sensed;

10        a sub control operation of receiving a second operation signal from a key switch, sensing an on state of the second operation signal when the key switch is depressed, and delivering information on the sensed on state of the second operation signal to a main control unit which performs the main control operation.